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Development Directions

A free resource for pastors, principals, development directors, volunteers and anyone engaged in the ministry of Catholic development.

"How Do We Build A *Quality* Environment in Our Catholic Parishes and Schools?"

By Frank Donaldson, President

Here at ISPD we have often made the following statement: *A Catholic institution is going to generate as many resources (new parish families, new students, dollars, community support, volunteers, etc.) as it deserves to generate. And, what it deserves to generate will be in direct relationship with the quality of its people, plans, programs and processes.*

Catholic institutions continue to go through tremendous change. The requirements of an increasingly demanding work environment, the many social issues that will confront us, the financial constraints that will continue to challenge, the ability to make the Catholic faith come alive, the vast advances in technology, the world economy - all of these and more continue to drive vast improvements in the ways we teach, preach and engage people. The success of our Catholic parishes and schools in managing this change will determine our ability to compete and survive - as churches, as schools, as systems, and as individuals in the 21st century.

The past eighteen years of conducting workshops and doing on-site consulting with Catholic institutions across the country has been an eye-opener. It is indeed interesting that, although some Catholic parishes and schools are doing an outstanding job of visioning, planning, advancing and developing, there are many Catholic leaders who need a much better understanding of the many challenges they face and how to approach and solve them. We have seen many parishes and schools who are still doing the same thing they were doing 5-10-15-20 years ago:

- Autocratic style of management;
- Traditional classroom management where the teacher knows everything;
- Little attention given to long-range planning;

- Starting each year with excitement but back to the "same old routine" within a few months;
- Putting out fires day-to-day with "crisis du jour" management;
- Living their life on a two-year cycle with no long-range vision for the future;
- Not having a clear mission and purpose;
- Disharmony between the parish and the elementary school;
- Diocesan offices being understaffed to reach out and bring quality to all parishes and schools;
- The majority of the decisions being made based upon finances only;
- Many of the same Catholic leaders involved in our institutions year after year after year with burn-out at a premium;
- Living in a reactive stance where we always are wondering where the next bombshell is going to come from;
- Paying lip service to "shared decision making" and "input" from our constituencies;
- Building our development efforts around money, money, money and not people;
- Providing a few days of in-service for staff and calling that "staying abreast of the latest;"
- Still thinking that all students are going to learn at the same pace and testing them all the same way - year after year;
- Not having a clear idea of who our "customers" are or how to relate to them.

And yet, we have seen Catholic institutions who are on the "cutting edge of excellence."

Are our people to blame? Are our Catholic pastors, principals, staff, and parish leaders the reason why many parishes and schools are not moving ahead with *quality*, ambition and meaning? Resoundingly - no!

It has become very clear to us that Catholic parishes and schools continue to be a fundamental pillar to our nation's moral fiber and the solution to a whole set of challenges this country and this society faces.

However, we will have to dramatically change the way we do business.

The bottom line is that despite their dedication and attempts at innovation, Catholic culture remains slow to change - slow to react to the demands of an increasingly technical and competitive world. Today, people want to be engaged and connected, and so it is important that we position our parishes and schools to invite and involve. *Belonging leads to believing*. However, when we move in that direction, we need to make sure that a *quality* environment is at the heart of that change. And what is a *quality* environment? This modus operandi is all about continuous improvement and customer service.

Catholic parishes and schools are institutions that, like many others, are not conducive to this type of change. Change is onerous - it affects the organizations and people we have grown accustomed to. Many of us fear change, since it destabilizes our lives and breaks the status quo, but change is also inevitable and constant, and so our ability to embrace and manage change becomes our ability to succeed in the future.

A *Quality* approach is an important part of the process of managing such change. It

involves the tools we give all of our people to do their job. *Quality* is not the end - it is the means. It requires a change in culture and in operations. And while the operations and outputs of parishes and schools are clearly different from those of the business world who apply TQM (*Total Quality Management*), the lessons of change in corporate America and the processes applied are invaluable to our Catholic culture.

Total Quality Management represents a comprehensive, systemic approach to making improvements. *Quality* gives stakeholders the ways and means to judge each initiative within a larger organizational context. It can build on what is working well in Catholic parishes and schools and what leaders hold dear. This reinforcement - and the ability to make continuous improvements over time - is far preferable to crisis-driven, ad-hoc state of decision making. The ability to define, analyze, and redesign a system is essential for sustaining restructuring efforts targeted at organizational performance.

Addressing isolated elements of parish and school life - music ministry, curriculum, finances - has proved at best only minimally successful. Increasing numbers of Catholic leaders across the country are becoming concerned that many parts of the system itself need to be redesigned. They recognize that substance and process issues must become joined as part of the same agenda. And, there are many that are willing to lead that change. But these innovators - people like yourself - need the organizational capacity to make that change happen. Thus, what a *Total Quality* approach offers is a way to piece together the various fabrics of our Catholic parishes and schools into a systemic "whole cloth." Building a *quality* environment connects the dots - by engaging people, emphasizing continuous improvement, and making sure "customer service" (serving others) is at the core.



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